

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Nairnshire Committee** held in the Chamber, The Court House, High Street, Nairn on Thursday, 21 September 2017 at 10.30 am

Present:

Mr L Fraser
Mr T Heggie

Mrs L MacDonald
Mr P Saggars

In attendance:

Ms L Cowie, Ward Manager, Nairn and Badenoch and Strathspey
Mr B Alexander, Director of Care and Learning
Mr R Porteous, Road Operations Manager, Community Services
Mr R MacLeod, Principal Housing Officer, Community Services
Mr S Taylor, Administrative Assistant, Corporate Development

Also in attendance:

Mr B MacKay, South Highland Area Commander, Police Scotland (Item 4)
Mr D Kilday, Programme Manager, C3IR Programme, Police Scotland (Item 4)

An asterisk in the margin denotes a recommendation to the Council. All decisions with no marking in the margin are delegated to the Committee.

Mr T Heggie in the Chair

Preliminaries

Prior to the commencement of the formal business, the Chair advised that the press would be allowed to record the meeting since it was a public meeting and was not webcast.

Business

1. Apologies for Absence Leisgeulan

There were no apologies for absence.

2. Declarations of Interest Foillseachaidhean Com-pàirt

The Committee **NOTED** the following Declarations of Interest:-

Item 7 – Mr L Fraser (non-financial)

3. Recess Powers Cumhachdan Fosaidh

The Committee **NOTED** that the recess powers granted by the Council at its meeting on 29 June 2017 did not required to be exercised in relation to the business of the Nairnshire Committee.

4. Police Scotland – Area Performance Summary Poileas Alba – Geàrr-chunntas Dèanadais Sgìreil

There had been circulated Report No N/9/17 dated 31 August 2017 by the South Highland Area Commander which provided a local summary update on progress with reference to the local priorities within the Highland 2014-2017 Policing Plan.

In discussion, the following points were raised:-

- Confirmation was sought, and received, that the figures contained within the report in relation to the detection of drug dealing and misuse were cases which might not have gone to court and this figure might vary for the next period following conclusion of the investigations progress and gathering of evidence;
- It was highlighted that there had been significant reduction in licensed premises checks compared to the same period one year previously. In response, it was confirmed that this had been noted at a local level and that the number of visits to licensed premises would be increased;
- It was highlighted that whilst concern which had been expressed locally regarding a link between young people and vandalism, this had been carried out by only a very small number of young people and it was emphasised that the majority of young people in Nairn were well behaved;
- The importance of providing alternative opportunities for young people to become actively engaged with the local community and make a positive contribution was emphasised;
- Comments made on social media blaming young people for a spate of vandalism could generate ill-feeling within the local community and did not solve the problem;
- Reassurance was sought, and received, that an increase in antisocial behaviour and dishonesty had occurred as a result of repeat offenders;
- The Force was congratulated on the positive work arising from Operation Monarda which had sought to minimise the risk to vulnerable people from criminals;
- The report had highlighted a number of areas which were performing well and the proactive approach taken to young people was commended;
- It was emphasised that the Community Planning Partnership presented an opportunity to positively engage with young people on the democratic process and future plans for Nairnshire and that recent criticism of the Partnership had been unjust; and
- The force in Nairnshire was commended for the “soft-policing” approach it had taken recently towards gypsy-travellers in the area, and in particular from one travelling family who had also praised the force for the respect it had shown towards them.

At this point, a presentation was undertaken by Mr D Kilday, Programme Manager of the C3IR (Contact, Command and Control Integration and Remodelling) Programme on the ongoing work to relocate control room functions for North Division from Inverness to Dundee as part of the remodelling of control rooms across Scotland during which he provided information on the background and reasons for the transition, the benefits to local communities, the retention of local knowledge, how the transition would be scrutinised and how it would be delivered in a safe and secure manner. In this regard, he advised that this option would be presented to the Board of the Scottish Police Authority (SPA) on 28 September 2017 for approval. He

also extended an invitation to Members to visit the new Police Scotland Service Centre in Dundee to view systems at first hand.

In discussion, the following points were raised:-

- In expressing disappointment at the proposals to close the Police Control Room in Inverness, reassurance was sought, and received, that there would be no redundancies as a result from any closure of the Police Control Room and that all staff affected would be offered employment in the new National Database Enquiry Unit (NDEU) in Inverness;
- The closure of the Police Control Room in Aberdeen had raised awareness of potential issues which could occur during the closure of the Inverness control room and the reassurance provided by Police Scotland that the Inverness control room would not close until all the necessary checks had been made was welcomed;
- Following comment that some case of dialling the non-emergency number (101) from the Highlands had resulted in calls being answered by a call-centre in Manchester, confirmation was sought, and received, that following the relocation of control room functions from Inverness to Dundee, non-emergency calls made in the Highlands would be answered by staff within police call-centres based in Scotland; and
- Concern was expressed regarding the potential for a general failure of telecommunications should powerlines and telephone lines be damaged during a major incident.

Having thanked officers for their presentations, the Committee **NOTED** and scrutinised the progress report in relation to the four priorities – Road Safety, Drug Dealing and Misuse, Antisocial Behaviour and Dishonesty.

5. Proposals for Changes to the Governance of Education Molaidhean airson Atharrachaidhean do Riaghladh Foghlaim

There had been circulated Report No N/10/17 dated 31 August 2017 by the Director of Care and Learning.

During discussion, the following comments were made:-

- The importance of collaborative working to ensure that children from more deprived backgrounds would be able to achieve higher standards was emphasised;
- In welcoming the willingness by the Council to work with the Government, it was emphasised that the Highlands had very specific conditions in relation to rural schools and the way in which children's services were delivered;
- Concern was expressed that the proposal for head teachers to assume full responsibility in closing the poverty related attainment gap in schools was an unreasonable expectation;
- Concern was also expressed at the financial and administrative challenges that head teachers in small rural schools were currently dealing with;
- The curriculum in secondary schools was dependent on the number of staff per pupil and it was highlighted that some subjects were not available to pupils in Nairn Academy due to a lack of available staff in some subject areas;

- It was emphasised that more focus should be made on the existing issues faced by rural schools and in delivering a holistic and rounded education to pupils;
- With regard to proposals for head teachers to have more direct control over school funding, it was queried whether this would extend to budgets in relation to improvements to buildings;
- Concern was expressed at how the issue of under-performance at senior management level would be addressed;
- The importance of maintaining continuity with regard to management at senior level when establishing initiatives such as the Regional Improvement Collaboratives (RICs) was emphasised;
- With regard to the Getting it Right for Every Child (GIRFEC) approach, concern was expressed that there was an expectation under the proposed changes for head teachers to undertake work that may be more appropriate for Children's Services to deal with;
- Concern was expressed at the language used within school reports which was sometimes difficult to understand and that greater use of Plain English should be encouraged;
- Concern was expressed regarding the level of bureaucracy encountered by assessors of the Curriculum for Excellence programme;
- The current structural state of the Nairn Academy building was perceived to be a significant hindrance to the performance of teachers and pupils at the school; and
- Reassurance was sought, and received, that following high level discussion between the Council and Scottish Government, discussion would continue with the Education Secretary to address concerns raised regarding the proposed changes to the governance of education.

Having discussed the Scottish Government's recently announced proposals for the reform of education governance, the Committee:-

- i. **NOTED** that the Council had agreed to seek to work with Government, including through CoSLA, the Northern Alliance and other fora in an endeavour to influence the proposals in a more positive and constructive direction; and
- ii. **AGREED** that Members seek views on the proposals through discussions in their communities and particularly through discussions with their respective Parent Councils.

6. **Nairn Common Good Fund – Quarter 1 2017/18 Monitoring Report** **Maoin Math Coitcheann Inbhir Narann – 2017/18 Aithisg Sgrùdaidh Cairteil 1**

There had been circulated joint report No N/11/17 dated 12 September 2017 by the Director of Finance and Inverness City Manager.

In speaking to the report, the Ward Manager informed Members that a report would be brought to a future meeting of the Committee outlining options following the consultation on the paddling pool at the Links. Members were also informed that the annual report for the Nairn Common Good Fund would be presented alongside the Quarter 2 2017/18 Monitoring Report at the next meeting of the Committee in December and that it was anticipated that the audited accounts would also be available for presentation at the December meeting.

Thereafter, the Committee **NOTED** the position of the Nairn Common Good Fund, as shown in the Quarter 1 2017/18 Monitoring Statement against budget.

7. Housing Performance Report – 1 April 2017 to 30 June 2017
Aithisg Dèanadais Taigheadais – 1 Giblean 2017 gu 30 T-og Mhios 2017

Declaration of Interest: Mr L Fraser declared a non-financial interest in this item as a Sub-Contractor for the Housing Service in Nairn but, having applied the test outlined in Paragraphs 5.2 and 5.3 of the Councillors' Code of Conduct, concluded that his interest did not preclude his involvement in the discussion.

There had been circulated Report No N/12/17 dated 12 September 2017 by the Director of Community Services.

During discussion, the following comments were made:-

- Confirmation was sought, and received, as to the nature of the decrease in rent arrears during the first quarter of 2017/18, which was attributed to both an increase in households accessing welfare support through the assistance of officers and a proactive approach taken to address rent arrears;
- In welcoming the decrease in re-let times, the importance of retaining local housing staff and knowledge was emphasised;
- Following confirmation that the figures provided in Table 5 of the report were in relation to the number of new homelessness presentations made per quarter; it was requested that information be provided on the number of individuals currently homeless, including those in temporary accommodation, seeking rehousing;
- It was highlighted that the average length of time households were staying in temporary accommodation had increased due to a lack of available housing stock and low turnover in specific types of accommodation such as three bedroom houses; and
- The Chair, on behalf of the Committee, congratulated housing staff on the high standards which had been set in the area and asked that the Committee's thanks and appreciation be passed on to officers.

The Committee **NOTED** and scrutinised the information provided on housing performance for the period 1 April to 30 June 2017.

8. Nairn Winter Maintenance Plan for 2017/18
Plana Obair-gleidhidh Geamhraidh airson 2017/18

There had been circulated Report No N/13/17 dated 1 September 2017 by the Director of Community Services.

During discussion, confirmation was sought, and received, regarding the following:-

- Staffing levels for the Nairnshire area were currently at the same level as the year previously;
- Grit bins would be filled prior to the onset of winter to enable Community Self-Help groups under the Council's "Winter Resilience" scheme to carry out supplementary footpath gritting when required;

- The expenditure for Community Self-Help was based on a one-off gift of equipment such as extra grit bins and snow shovels to communities;
- There were no public liability insurance implications arising from Community Self-Help groups undertaking their own gritting operations within agreed areas; and
- The Council had a three year framework in place which enabled additional resources to be called in from local contractors to assist at short notice in clearing deep snow during exceptional winter conditions.

The Committee **APPROVED** the Winter Maintenance Plan for the Nairn Area for 2017/18, which included the priority road maps presented at Appendix 2 to the report.

9. Minutes of Previous Meeting Geàrr-chunntas

There had been circulated and were **NOTED** Minutes of Meeting of the Nairnshire Committee held on 23 June 2017, which had been approved by the Council on 29 June 2017.

The meeting concluded at 11.50 am